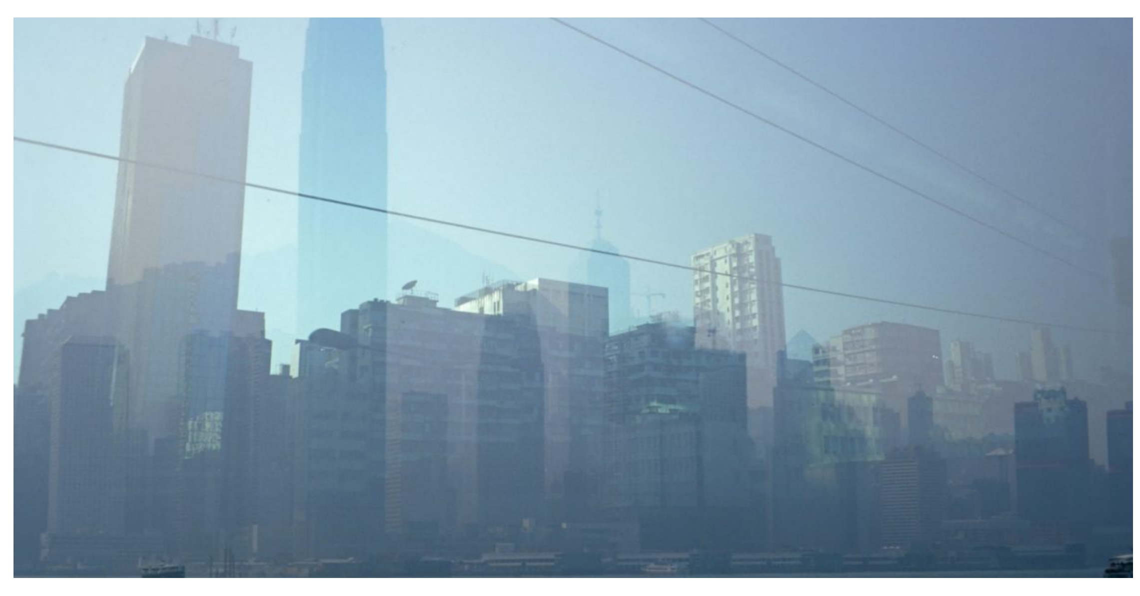






ACHIM SZEPANSKI 2019-10-17

THE GLOBAL WORLD ORDER

ECONOFICTION CAPITAL, CHINA, FINANCE, IMPERIALISM, WORLD ECONOMY, WORLD MARKET

The fact that struggles for reproductive conditions or circulation struggles are increasing again worldwide at the moment is no coincidence. In France in particular, they are increasing in intensity from week to week with the Yellow West. The shifts are easy to understand there, the radicalism of the Riots, the interventions they allow the left, the heterogeneity of the fighters, the increase in civil war, the possibility of intensifying social struggles and the involvement of migrants, the crisis of the state, which is becoming increasingly fascinated, all this points to the urgency of destitution of the existing system. We first discuss the current imperialist world order and then the question of the struggles in France.

If one looks at the cartography of the globe from the point of view of the capitalist mode of production, then not only the networked structures in the world economy exist, but also a still hierarchical hierarchy of states among themselves.

First, there are the non-industrialized countries, in which the multinational companies are excessively exploiting natural resources, energy and labour, which is linked to the destruction of traditional methods of production and production units. Some of these countries suffer from relative poverty, others even have to accept processes of absolute impoverishment, while all these countries have low or even negative GDP growth. There is still a sector of non-capitalist production that should not be underestimated (cf. Sanyal: 2014), and not only in agricultural production. At the same time, however, farmers who have hitherto practiced non-capitalist methods of agricultural production are forced to migrate to the cities. As workers there they receive low wages and struggle with miserable working conditions. Imperialist land seizures lead to a new form of legalization inasmuch as they configure a spatial order of divisions, i.e. establish a new system of borders and disjunctions, namely as a distinction between inside and outside in the spaces of the peripheries themselves. Finally, the capital and the states of the West systematically drive the countries of the global South to increase above all the output of their agricultural products and raw materials for export, so that especially the agricultural sectors in Africa and West Asia are characterized by subsistence farming on the one hand and the cultivation of cash corps for export on the other. The countries remain completely dependent on the world market. At the same time, Western countries protect their own agricultural sectors, erect trade barriers and increase their farmers' income through subsidies, which in turn limits the demand for food from the global South and further worsens their terms of trade. The mechanisms of unequal trade are further reinforced under the global imperialism of multinational corporations.

This is followed on the scale by the partially industrialized countries, where mainly cheap consumer goods or intermediate goods are produced and simple technologies are used. Some of these countries are attempting to set in motion more intensive capital accumulation by breaking some of the rules of neoliberal globalization and working with the means of protectionism, dumping prices and currency manipulation to slowly close the gaps to the centers. This is hardly ever the case. The neo-mercantilist policies of the western states are forcing the southern states to dismantle their trade barriers and loosen their environmental and social policies.

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The emerging countries, especially China, but also other countries in East Asia and the BRICS countries now enjoy significant trade balance advantages, while most of the capitalist core countries – with the exception of Japan and Germany – have current account deficits, especially the USA with the largest deficit. These processes generate new contrasts at the global level, even in the imperial centers themselves. In some emerging markets, low wages, low corporate taxation and weak environmental policies may allow internal economic growth to move forward.

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In the years from 1997 to 2010, nominal wages rose in China, but so did prices. The increase in wages was lower than the increase in productivity, so labour costs remained relatively low. This also continues to encourage foreign direct investment, which brings capital, machinery, organizational and technical know-how to the country, stimulating further productivity growth. Capital movements and the banking system remain under strict state control so that monetary policy can support industrial policy. The undervaluation of the yuan has set in motion a cycle that supports the high growth rates of the Chinese economy because favorable exchange rates promote exports. Thus, the trade balances show a surplus that generally allows national governments in emerging countries a certain autonomy in monetary and fiscal policy, which they in turn use to compensate for the negative effects of international economic crises on their own countries. However, it must be added that while China has massively boosted exports, it has also massively imported – raw materials from the South and technology from the West. The enormous amount of domestic investment as a driver of growth in the Chinese national economy should not be underestimated. China and other emerging markets have suffered less from the effects of the financial crisis since 2008, as their governments have been able to compensate for falling commodity exports with expansive fiscal policies and a boost to domestic demand. Thus, in those emerging economies that ride the wave of international capital movements, the state can continue to play the role of collective capitalist relatively effectively if it manages industrial development and continues to stabilize social peace by sucking in external resources or direct investment. (Screpanti 2014: 100ff.)

The industrial and commodity sector today, even in export-oriented countries, is structurally dependent on the dynamics of fictitious and speculative capital, where, as a result of derivatives and other new financial products, yields are still higher than real profit rates, interest rates and growth rates, despite the interest rate cuts by central banks. This is obviously also the case in China, which in recent decades has bought up large numbers of financial stocks, mainly from the USA, with the proceeds from the worldwide export of its goods. Following the 2008 crash, the Chinese government also began to compensate for the lack of fictitious and speculative capital from abroad by creating the same forms of capital domestically, especially as a result of the creation of credit by state-controlled banks, as a result of which China's internal indebtedness has risen sharply and now represents a global crisis risk.

In the countries of the West, globalization has often enough intensified the economic depression in recent years, with public resources dwindling to be able, for example, to smoothly secure social peace in the future. Today, the capitalist core countries are confronted with an increasing influx of goods from the emerging markets and, at least as far as trade in goods is concerned, are in intense competition with them. Many of their national companies are responding with offshoring, outsourcing and foreign investment strategies. (ibid.: 122) This has a recessive effect on their own national economies, while the budget budgets of states often tend to be in deficit, which in turn drastically limits the scope for an expansive economic policy by governments and leads to an ever stricter austerity policy. Thus, the dominant macroeconomic policy remains focused on the continuation of austerity policy, fiscal consolidation and regressive taxation, which favors especially the wealthy who can grant loans and speculate on the financial markets. However, austerity policy should not be seen only as a fiscal response to the 2008 financial crisis, but as a general policy strategy of expanding the debt economy, with which large parts of the population now generate surplus financial capital through their daily cash flows (loans), through interest payments and through the mechanism of securitisation of loans, which allows debt to be treated in a differentiated way as a source of profit. Austerity policy is a class-specific "put option" that discriminates against the socially vulnerable sections of the population and also has racist and gender-specific connotations possesses. One of the biggest redistributive measures in history, after the 2008 financial crisis, rescued the major private banks by the states of the capitalist core countries, forced the austerity policy even harsher on the populations. Ultimately, it was the US and China that cobbled together the ways out of the 2008 financial crisis: on the one hand, the US government and the Fed, which pumped trillions of dollars into European commercial banks and central banks through monetary policy agreements; on the other, China, through its state-led economic management, provided enormous domestic investment while retaining the worthless dollar assets and not flooding the markets with them.

It is easy to see how the lack of private demand from households, but also from companies, in recent years has been compensated by the central banks by activating the monetary pumps, which, although they have been successful in avoiding further financial crashes to date, have by no means freed the economies from the recession, companies from bankruptcies and workers from wage stagnation and unemployment, but have only promoted asset inflation in the financial markets. So the 2008 financial crisis did not lead to a total collapse, even though it caused the sharpest decline in industrial investment and production since the 1930s. The financial sector itself was saved by the state bailout and massive injections of credit and money. Overall, the capitalist sector was to be supported by interest rates close to or equal to zero, in some cases even negative interest rates, a central bank policy known as "quantitative easing". In the capitalist core countries, average economic growth (real GDP growth) has not exceeded two percent since the 2008 crash, and growth rates have also fallen in the emerging markets, while debt in all sectors and inflation in financial asset prices have continued to grow worldwide.

From this point of view, the governments of the capitalist core countries are in a quite ambivalent relationship with the multinationals. Although most core country governments continue to propagate globalisation to meet the demand of national and multinational companies, they must also try to counter the depressive effects of globalisation on their economies. In order to escape this dilemma, the US and Germany in particular have adopted certain policy strategies based on a specific alliance between the national capitalist class and the state.

Germany continues to seek to take advantage of globalization by pursuing outdated neo-mercantilist policies (consisting not only of massive export successes, but also of suppressed imports). One of the most important weapons remains the maintenance of low relative wage levels (wages are low relative to productivity) and restrictive monetary and fiscal policies, so that domestic effective demand and GDP growth tend to stagnate while domestic production continues to be driven by exports. But once the German export engine starts to stutter, right-wing populist movements will undoubtedly gain further ground. On economic issues, the right AfD could become interesting for some factions of German capital even if the current government fails to maintain a world-market-oriented policy against the US government around Trump and they seek political allies who pursue pronounced protectionist and bilateral economic policies.

The ability of the US to perform its function of global governance has been further limited by certain restructurings in world markets and the related depressive effects on its economy. Since the 1970s, the U.S. state has attempted to promote the growth of its own economy by using expansionary monetary policy to promote speculative investment and accelerate deindustrialization in its own country. (Cf. Norfield 2016) This type of accumulation of US capital was definitely a catalyst that also enabled the economic expansion of China, India, Russia and Brazil. With its balance of payments deficit, the US stimulated exports and thus growth in emerging markets, while at the same time providing domestic financial capital with further opportunities for an unchecked flow of money capital to support the expansion of global trade and the accumulation of money capital and reserves in the rest of the world. After the end of the Bretton Woods agreement, the US forced its deficits to rise by making its own markets function like a vacuum cleaner that absorbed enormous net exports from Germany, Japan and China. The deficits were financed by foreign monetary capital, about seventy percent of the profits of European, Japanese and Chinese net exporters flowed into the places and channels of the US financial industry in search of higher profits. Thus, the US absorbed a large share of industrial goods from the rest of the world, while the US financial system spent large loans on US consumers, whose wages stagnated as a result of what increased the US profit rate and made Wall Street even more lucrative for foreign capital. In addition, direct investment in US companies was steered and the purchase of US government bonds encouraged, thus financing the US budget deficit. This was only possible through major re-regulations of the international financial system, which integrated Europe's financial centers in particular, and also managed to add two billion workers from the former Soviet Union, China and India to the global proletariat from the 1990s onwards, who produced the new output of goods that carried trade flows towards the U.S.

It was the Reagan government that, from 1981, exploited the dollar's position as world money, supported the dynamics of the financial markets, and transformed the U.S. with its high-interest policy into a reservoir of global money capital seeking investment opportunities. Although the permanent inflow of foreign money capital promoted the US economy, the high level of interest rates placed a heavy burden on US industry for a certain period of time and, in addition, the upturn in the dollar that accompanied the inflow of foreign money capital reduced the international competitiveness of industrial companies. (Cf. Shaikh 2016) It should therefore be borne in mind that the decline in jobs in the US industrial sectors was not the result of fixed commercial transactions, as Trump now wants the public to know, but is above all attributable to the strategies of American capital to reduce labour costs by introducing new technologies and continuing to create zones of cheap labour in the global South. In addition, US financial capital itself exported ever larger masses of fictitious and speculative capital and promoted foreign direct investment. The interests of the US financial industry in this process are evident, because as long as the dollar remains the international reserve and reserve currency, both the export and import of capital generate strong profits. In addition, the various debt processes enable the country to continue to consume more than it produces. And as long as US GDP rises as a result of consumption, military spending can also rise.

Meanwhile, one problem remains: how can the US increase domestic demand (and investment) while the tendency for multinationals to outsource production continues? A strong financial system and consumer credit have allowed private consumption to be promoted first (while wage levels have fallen), so the solution should be economic growth related to debt production. The debt of the US as a whole consists of the private debt of households (including that of part of the working class that was able to buy houses and consumer goods) and businesses, plus the public debt plus the foreign debt (countries that invest in US assets the dollar balances they obtain through their net exports). The Fed's expansive monetary policy promoted all these debt processes, causing more and more high indebtedness. It should again be noted that most foreign assets held by the US are denominated in foreign currency and 95 percent of liabilities are denominated in dollars. Now, if the dollar is devalued, the value of US assets rises without the value of liabilities rising. This requires an automatic transfer of wealth from the rest of the world to the US. Europe enjoys a similar advantage.

Despite the massive balance of payments deficits, US capital has been able to permanently export money abroad due to the strong financial industry. US capital exports rose from almost zero in 1970 to 600 billion dollars in 1987 and to ten trillion dollars a year, before falling sharply after the crash in 2008 and rising again to five trillion dollars in 2010. US capital thus has a number of possibilities to extract profits from the rest of the world and thus at least cushion the problem of the fall in the profit rates of US companies. Trump's current protectionist trade wars are attempts to solve the US crisis (while domestic growth rates are currently rising), attacking mainly countries like China and Germany, both of which have high trade surpluses. Such strategies, which are composed of threats, higher tariffs and trade wars, are intended to stabilize the US dollar as a strong global reserve currency, while at the same time the US Federal Reserve is slowly raising key interest rates and thus making foreign investments in the US more attractive, especially those of global financial capital. Investors are indeed currently withdrawing billions of dollars of money

from emerging markets, which will continue to weigh on the currencies of these countries. Reshoring, the relocation of production facilities back to the US, has increased in recent years due to rising wages in China and other Asian countries even without protectionist intervention. The cost advantages for multinationals that they achieve through operations in their global networks are shrinking. Protectionist policies are not aimed at comprehensive de-globalization, but at re-globalization based on specific capital fractions and requiring the construction of new corridors and channels at the global level.

But here, too, the dollar must be reiterated as the world's leading trade currency, with 80% of dollar-denominated imports never touching US territory. Investors need dollar certificates to hedge their currency risks and they need safe dollar bonds, as safe assets are essential to hedge the purchase of goods and services in the future. Financial capital is a more important force than commonly assumed, as evidenced by the fact that global US dollar liquidity, measured in bank loans to non-banks, has grown by more than 90% since 2008, while global trade has grown by less than 20%. The share of dollar-denominated FX swaps and forwards denominated in dollars exceeds the dollar's share of world trade by 50%. Financial firms currently hold swaps and forwards worth $23 trillion. Investments in profitable financial assets are far ahead of investments in non-financial companies, so that the fall in the profit rate in these companies should also be put into perspective as a cause of the crisis.

It is well known that after the financial crisis of 2008 the US banks were no longer able to use the two deficits of the US, the foreign trade and the budget deficit, to generate demand within the US and thus promote the net exports of the rest of the world. The result was an increase in debt. Global debt, including the financial sector, has grown to 247 trillion dollars today, about 250 percent of global GDP. In the years from 2014 to 2017 alone, debt grew by 13 percent. Those debts that could possibly herald an imminent credit crisis, if you look at the US, are likely to be not only those of households or the state that implements comprehensive austerity measures in the social sector, but also, and above all, those of private companies. The Fed is now trying to reduce the credit excess it helped to initiate by raising key interest rates and returning to normality, but this will increase the costs of servicing loans for US companies and limit the possibilities for further credit financing. The average leverage of US companies (the ratio of debt to income) has risen from a factor of 3.4 to 4.1 over the past ten years, with many companies having to repay large amounts of their bond receivables totalling 41 trillion dollars at mostly higher interest rates over the next two years, which could put some companies at the end of their financial capacity. (Cf. Roberts 2018) Bond creditors will try to get out of their positions in order to avoid a shortage of buyers who are still willing to get in. However, it must be added that most of these outstanding payments of 41 trillion dollars are not due solely to private companies. Indeed, the Fed holds $17 trillion of this debt, and the bonds issued by non-financial companies amount to only $6.2 trillion in outstanding debt. the economic situation does not look very relaxed, because one third of all multinational companies today have five dollars in debt on a dollar's income, which makes them vulnerable to any drop in profits or rise in interest rates. And one in five companies has debt service obligations that exceed current cash flow. Large companies have used the cheap interest and debt to take cash off their balance sheets and hand it over to their shareholders in the form of dividends and share buybacks. About a third of the shares are bought back with borrowed money, leading to record levels of corporate debt, not only in absolute terms, but also in relation to profits, assets and overall economic output. Part of the corporate debt of recent years has again come from commercial bank loans, which have quickly been packaged, divided and sold to potent investors in collateralized loan obligations (CLOs). But pension funds and insurance companies also bought in because they expected high returns. Bank Wells Fargo estimates that a record $150 billion will be spent on CLOs in 2018, with market analysts registering a decline in the quality of CLOs, similar to subprime lending in 2007. Today, the economic boom is not driven by innovation or productivity growth, but by financial engineering, which produces debt by issuing promises of payment and shifts general wealth further towards the representatives of financial capital. It appears that the global economy is swimming in debt, not only in those of companies, but also in those of households, states and investors, at a time when interest rates are beginning to rise.

The capital flows of non-financial US companies, which are used to finance investments on a global scale, have fallen. According to the latest UNCTAD report, global foreign direct investment flows (FDI) fell by 23 percent in 2017. (Unctad 2017) Multinational companies are reducing their international investments partly to reduce the risks of future trade wars, which have increased as a result of Trump's protectionist measures, but also because of possible credit crises in the more vulnerable emerging economies. Overall, the profitability of foreign direct investment has fallen, and when corporate profit rates generally fall, investors continue to reduce their investments in production and increasingly turn to speculation with financial instruments such as derivatives. Here, too, however, we are faced with a downward trend on a global level, as total financial capital flows currently account for only 75 percent of sales in 2007. So the global financial sector itself is not quite prospering at the same level as before the 2008 financial crisis. Nevertheless, the ten largest US banks are making profits in 2018 as they did in 2007, a total of around $30 billion per quarter. At the same time, certain multinationals in the world's leading economies continue to swim in money. The Apple company, for example, sits on about 250 billion US dollars in ready-to-use cash, but does not find any profitable investment opportunities.

After this only very sketchy description of some of the trends that can be observed in the world economy today, we now come to some conclusions regarding the effects of globalization on the economies of the centers: 1) Consumption is declining due to a decline in employment and a reduction in real wages. 2) Industrial investment is stagnating due to competition with emerging countries and the consistent offshoring and outsourcing of large national companies, which are now becoming multinationals. 3) Public spending is being reduced both structurally and as a result of competition between countries. 4) Productivity is stagnating because, above all, the financial system is self-referential. 5) Exports are not growing sufficiently because international

competition with emerging markets is losing ground, so that industrial profit rates continue to fall. (Cf. Screpanti 2014: 127ff.)

The new form of imperialism is based on an implicit pact between the financial capital of the leading countries and the economies of the emerging markets. While the latter gain access to the commodity markets in the West and receive a flood of direct investment from large multinationals, the former have concluded agreements (TRIPS, Gatt, GATS) to protect patents and proprietary rights.

But also at a global level the aim is to create markets for services and to open up foreign markets for the company's own controls. The emerging countries were able to exploit the competitive costs of wages, they produce mainly low-tech consumer goods with imported technologies, then export them to the capitalist core countries and mercilessly fight the weaker firms there. But in the meantime they are also increasingly investing in research, which, however, still relies mainly on creative imitation and adaptation, but is also intended to promote innovations that help to reduce the technological gap compared with the high-tech core countries. In key industries such as robotics, the IT sector, aerospace and maritime engineering, renewable energies and electromobility, China aims to catch up technologically with Western core countries by 2035. In addition, Chinese companies have increased labour productivity while keeping labour costs low. We are now seeing the emergence of hypercapitalized centers in the emerging economies and peripheries, while "Third World zones" are emerging in the metropolises of the North, and the wage shares and working conditions of workers are deteriorating there.

And the representatives of capital, unimpressed, continue to propagate a beyond of borders by presenting themselves as the sole engine of global growth. In recent decades, a new global proletariat has emerged that on the one hand tends to homogenize in terms of political deconstitution and the reduction of wages, but on the other is spatially and socially fragmented in terms of the legal forms of the exact wage level and the distribution of production sites. This shows above all, as a sub-proletariat to be added, the surplus population that has emerged above all in the global South, which can no longer be used as variable capital and which falls completely out of the wage labor relations (but is partly reintegrated into the money cycles through microcredit). These complex processes of economic, political and social change at the global level lead to the fusion of two fundamental antagonisms: Because today neither free trade nor the mercantilist and protectionist policies currently implemented by parts of the ruling classes can even begin to solve the economic problems, the contrasts between capital and labor as well as between periphery and centers will increase in intensity. Today, internal and external colonization pervades all territories worldwide, the West has its South (through HartzIV, migrants, the unemployed and the poor), and the South has its West (through zones of high-tech production and comprador elites).

The relocation of industrial production from the West to the South there leads on the one hand to an increase in the wage-dependent proletariat, and on the other to the growth of a surplus population that is pushing into the cities but has no direct access to capitalist production and wages and therefore has to take care of access to goods in the informal sectors of the economy, which, beyond formal working conditions at low wages, with slave labour, part-time jobs and illegal activities, tries somehow to secure its reproduction or vegetates in the slums before it in order to survive. Groups such as Endnotes and Kosmoprolet (Endnotes 2018; Kosmoprolet 2016) at this point refer to Marx's law of capitalist accumulation, according to which an industrial reserve arm permanently moves at the margins of the official labor market. Marx describes the relative overpopulation purely functionally as the "industrial reserve army" that capital needs to regulate the labor market; the general law of capitalist accumulation is that of a (virtual) tendency and it is at the same time to be understood cyclically, that is, it always remains related to fluctuations in employment. (Marx 1975: 640ff.) At the same time, Marx assumes a long-term trend towards relative growth of the industrial reserve army – measured by the total working population. However, if the reserve army grows in the long term, it can hardly retain the character of a reserve army in the long run. And we find this development in the current situation at the global level, in which even parts of the population in the metropolises can no longer be productively absorbed into capitalist production processes during economic upswings. With an increasing working population at the global level, it seems that the population working for wages, the reserve army and the surplus population can grow at the same time. This "moving contradiction" manifests itself on the one hand in the integration of part, the second is the intensification of automation and robotization, which in turn make the proletariat superfluous at the global level. At the global level, Chinese growth rates and, contrary to the trend toward technologization and cybernetization, a labor-intensive production would already be needed to absorb the huge global surplus population. But this cannot be assumed.

The masses of unemployed, the totally detached, the day labourers and the Asian and African migrant workers used under proto-industrial conditions, the post-colonial army of slaves, the old and the sick, but also the superfluous young, those of an educational system, which focuses primarily on the daily evaluation of everyone by everyone, are trained for jobs that will not exist in the future – all in all this is the global lumpenproletariat that vegetates below the official working system on the thin line between bare survival and total liquidation. And this surplus population, when it moves on the streets and articulates politically, is directly confronted with the state and its police. (Cf. Clover 2016; Clover 2018; Szepanski 2018b)

Although it has long since assumed enormous quantitative proportions, the surplus population in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari remains a minority that is nothing more than a proletarian mass. But it is only in so far as it is directly confronted with the institutional, legal and police structures of the national state. Separated both from the social determination that constitutes the proletariat and from a strictly economic determination as variable capital that characterizes the working class, the minority as proletarianized mass always refers to processes of state socialization through which the state penetrates the institutional and

social structures of the capitalist formations. Furthermore, the minority could be described as internal differentiation in the processes of proletarization itself, between those from whom all social power is withdrawn through its integration into the system of wage labor, and those who can at best still be partially reintegrated into the economy (and the form of state). Thus, the minoritarian struggles, which are political in origin, cannot simply be equated with the economic struggles of the workers against capital, because it is directly the state that segments its minorities as relative surplus populations (in addition to the strategies of capital) with regard to the minoritarian struggles. To a certain extent, minorities remain involved in the processes of economic and social expropriation, and this in conjunction with diverse combinations of their destruction and territorial survival, which is why they can maintain a certain degree of autonomy in their codes, through which the state can recognize them as subsets.

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